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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002359

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY WATCHES AND WAITS FOR ASSOCIATIONS  
LAW IMPLEMENTATION

REF: A. AMMAN 1465  
[1](#)B. AMMAN 2062  
[1](#)C. AMMAN 2300

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel Rubinstein  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: One month after the end of the parliamentary session, Jordan's new law on associations is still awaiting royal signature (Refs A-C), but local and international NGOs are already starting to look at how the new law will be implemented. Minister of Social Development Hala Latouf is attempting to quiet concerns behind the scenes, especially those of international aid organizations. She has had some success, but her outreach has also opened up new questions about lacunae in the law. Some of Post's contacts are already looking for informal ways to get around the law's restrictions, but everyone is waiting for implementing regulations and other signals on how the law will be enforced before coming to a definitive judgment. End Summary.

Law Still Not Signed  
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[1](#)2. (C) Over one month after the end of parliament's extraordinary session, King Abdullah has yet to sign Jordan's controversial law on associations. Suggestions that the King could veto the bill generate skepticism among our senior contacts, primarily on the grounds that it would be the first veto of the King's ten-year reign. Kamil Abu Jaber, a former Foreign Minister and Forum for the Future board member, told poloff on August 12 that a veto of the legislation is politically impossible, as it would sour the relationship between the King and the parliament at a critical economic juncture. He believes that the best civil society can hope for is a "signing statement" by the King outlining future amendments.

Jordanian Civil Society Regroups  
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[1](#)3. (C) Jordanian NGOs are busy digesting the new law and assessing its potential impact. Chairman of the General Union of Charitable Societies and former Minister of Social Development Amin Mushaqba calls the new law a "positive step" which will modernize corporate governance within Jordanian civil society. He is already looking at changes to the Union's bylaws which the new law will necessitate. Lina Mola, the local head of SOS Children's Village, believes that the law will not impact the work of non-political charities: "Associations won't have a problem if they stay out of politics. Political organizations will have to convince the Ministry that their aims are healthy for Jordan." Hani Hourani, director of the Al-Urdun Al-Jadid ("New Jordan") Research Center, sees the law's passage as a defeat for civil society, but believes that Jordan's connection-based

political culture will ultimately allow for some flexibility.

"We can live with this law just as we lived with the old one," he says. Abu Jaber sees the law as a step backward, but posits that its impact will only be felt by smaller organizations which lack the capacity to deal with the law's regulatory requirements.

#### Minister Reaches Out to International NGOs

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14. (C) After the law was passed by Jordan's senate, a number of international NGOs, including a significant contingent of AID grantees such as Care and Mercy Corps, organized a meeting to hash out the impact of the law on their operations and attempt to prepare a coordinated action plan. According to David Brigham, the local head of Mercy Corps, when news of the meeting reached Minister of Social Development Hala Latouf, she offered to attend herself and explain how the law would be implemented. During the meeting, Latouf attempted to clarify the intent of the law and reassure key development partners that their work would not be negatively impacted. According to Brigham, Latouf indicated that money from USAID and other development agencies which flows through the Ministry of Planning was essentially "pre-approved" and would not be subject to further scrutiny. She also spoke about grandfathering in the registrations of international organizations which had already filed paperwork with MOSD, rather than requiring them to re-file with the registry as mandated by the law.

15. (C) While it was designed to allay concerns among international NGOs, Latouf's intervention also raised new questions. In addition to the anticipated inconveniences (e.g., the re-registration of NGOs currently registered with other ministries), international NGOs remain skeptical of

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assurances of informal workarounds, and are now focusing on the unintended consequences the law may have on their operations. Several aid organizations who use Amman as a logistical hub for work in Iraq have expressed to Post concerns that they will have to comply with the law's registration process and reporting requirements despite the fact that their programs have no footprint in Jordan itself. Among larger organizations, there is concern that the law has no provision for broad organizations with multiple goals and programs - there may be several "relevant ministers" who would have interests in different kinds of programs, but the law does not account for joint oversight.

#### Waiting and Seeing

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16. (C) Overall, most Jordanian civil society activists we talked to are taking a wait-and-see approach, hoping that inertia will ultimately dull the law's impact. Hourani believes that in the end, the new law will essentially function as the old one did - the government will retain the theoretical right to interfere in the affairs of civil society, but will not have the will, the time, or the manpower necessary to strictly apply the letter of the law. "The government will quickly see that the law is not practical," Hourani says. "It's silly to think that the cabinet has time to review every foreign grant. It's a stupid political game."

17. (C) Based on Brigham's account of discussions with his peers in the international aid community, there is still uncertainty on how strictly the law will be enforced. International NGOs would rather not risk damage to their access to government officials by raising issues with the law publicly at this time. The hope is that like its predecessor, enforcement of the new law will be lax. "We're hoping that this will be an inefficient process," Brigham declares. Yet even if the law becomes problematic, Brigham argues that alleged malicious intent alone is not a strong

enough argument to spark local and international NGOs to action. "Until we have had examples of enforcement, we won't be able to change this law," he says.

18. (C) There is broad recognition among our contacts that the current Minister of Social Development is generally sympathetic to civil society, and has its best interests at heart. Her behind-the-scenes assurances have helped to calm some of the more vocal activists and co-opt public opposition. Yet there is an underlying worry that Latouf's successors could attempt to enforce the law far more strictly. Hourani wonders out loud whether a "former Army man" would share Latouf's ideas on strengthening Jordanian civil society.

#### The Search for Workarounds Begins

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19. (C) Some of Post's more sophisticated civil society contacts are already starting to look at ways to circumvent the law's restrictive elements. Mola of SOS Children's Village has already approached Latouf about the possibility of securing "permanent prior permission" for foreign funding rather than approaching the cabinet for approval on individual projects. Others are planning to rely on their personal contacts within the ministries to obtain protection from oversight or amendments to the law. The local director of UNICEF, for example, told us that he was planning to meet with the Ministry of Planning in an effort to secure an exemption to the restrictions on local fundraising by international organizations.

10. (C) Latouf tacitly acknowledged to PolCouns on July 29 that certain parts of the law (especially the restrictions on foreign funding) would prove unworkable in practice. Saying that it would be "a huge headache," Latouf added that cabinet review of all foreign funding requests was "a challenge." Stressing that she was still thinking about how implementation would work in practice, Latouf left the door open to amending the law should its provisions prove onerous on the government.  
Rubinstein